



Postsecondary Opportunities in Tennessee:
Results of the
2002 Senior Opinions Survey

Presented to the Tennessee P-16 Council

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Background



- **Less than twenty percent of the adult population (aged 25 and older) in Tennessee does not possess a bachelor's degree, compared to the national average of 25.2 percent.**
- **One in four Tennesseans lacks a high school diploma (U.S. Census 2000).**
- **These extremely low rates of educational preparation undercut economic competitiveness and impede the state's the ability to attract cutting edge business and industry.**



Pipeline Concerns



- **Not only does Tennessee suffer from low educational attainment levels, it also has low high school and college participation rates.**
- **Mortenson (2001) notes that less than 54 percent of students who started the 9th grade in 1995 had graduated on time by 1999.**
- **Callan (2000) reports that only 34 percent of 9th graders graduate and attend college within five years of starting high school, compared to 54 percent in “top states.”**



P-16 and a Focus on Educational Transitions



- **One of the primary objectives of the Tennessee P-16 Council is to identify barriers in the educational transition from middle school to high school, and from high school onto college.**
- **The purpose of the *2002 Senior Opinions Survey* was to aid in this identification process, and to inform policymakers of the college choice decisions of the 2002 high school graduating class in Tennessee.**



Methodology



- The survey was distributed to graduating seniors in early May of 2002.
- Most students establish their final search criteria by April of their senior year and made their final college choice decision by mid to later May (Lewis and Morrison 1975).
- A large stratified, random sample of the high schools and students was employed to target graduating students representing @ 50,000 seniors in the public and private secondary schools.
- The sample was stratified along the following criteria to ensure that a proper representation of high schools was included in the target pool: ¹ the three grand divisions of the state; ² size of high school; ³ urban/rural geographic areas; and ⁴ sixteen diverse regions of Tennessee as established by the Tennessee Secondary School Athletic Association.



Methodology



- Seventy-three high schools were included in the study, with proportional samples taken from each of those high schools.
- The survey instrument and procedures were pre-tested in early March 2002 and changes were made to the survey for distribution at the end of April 2002.
- The survey instrument was distributed to homeroom and/or senior English classes for administration by the teacher of record. This process ensured the completion of a high percentage of the surveys supplied to each school.
- Overall, 88.7 percent of the surveys distributed to the 73 participating institutions were returned.



Table 1: High Schools Participating in the 2002 Senior Opinion Survey

High School	2002-03 Enrollment	Sample Target	Completed Surveys	High School	2002-03 Enrollment	Sample Target	Completed Surveys
Alcoa High School	386	20	13	Livingston Academy	330	40	40
Amock High School	1,982	90	90	Madison Co. High School	743	30	29
Baylee School	607	30	20	McHenry Central High School	756	40	26
Big Sandy High School	136	20	13	Memphis Central High School	1,333	60	22
Bolinger Central High School	359	40	33	Millers High School	644	30	29
Bruceston Central High School	233	20	20	Mitchell High School	369	20	11
Chapman Co. High School	1,372	60	51	Morehouse High School	532	30	29
Clatsop Co. High School	738	30	26	Oak Ridge High School	1,457	70	65
Claiborne Co. High School	1,347	60	59	Okeechobee Co. High School	375	40	41
Cleveland High School	1,167	50	37	Ozark High School	359	20	19
Collierville High School	1,935	90	80	Perry Co. High School	332	20	13
Collierville High School	324	20	13	Red Bank High School	1,313	60	56
Columbia Central High School	1,346	60	53	Richmond High School	425	20	20
Columbia High School	1,907	90	63	Ridgeway High School	357	40	33
Columbia High School	2,034	90	75	Riverside High School	2,313	90	36
Columbia High School	307	40	40	Science Hill High School	1,335	30	74
Crocket Co. High School	747	30	30	Sevier Co. High School	511	30	30
Cumberland Co. High School	1,746	30	73	Sevierville High School	774	40	26
DeKalb Co. High School	501	30	30	Shelbyville Central High School	1,037	50	50
Dickson Co. High School	2,144	90	91	Sidney Daley High School	1,724	30	57
Dyersburg High School	1,051	50	43	South Doyle High School	1,343	60	49
Eastman Co. High School	1,500	70	69	South Pittsburg High School	274	20	20
Eastman High School	1,462	70	69	Stewart Co. High School	532	30	24
Eastman High School	1,593	30	79	Sumner Central High School	983	50	50
Eastman-Pineola High School	732	30	30	Sumner Central High School	497	20	20
Goodpasture Christian School	377	20	14	Tenneco High School	1,031	50	23
Greeneville High School	737	30	30	Union Co. High School	755	40	39
Greeneville High School	759	40	35	Union Co. High School	379	40	40
Hamock Co. High School	369	20	20	University School of Jackson	316	20	19
Hartwood High School	980	50	44	Warren Co. High School	1,763	30	71
Hickman Co. High School	1,001	50	43	Warner Central High School	623	30	29
Jackson Central-Mary High School	1,591	30	54	Webb School of Knoxville	417	20	20
Jackson Co. High School	1,752	30	33	Westview High School	624	30	30
Lake Co. High School	224	20	19	White Co. High School	1,056	50	43
Lenoir City High School	983	40	35	White Creek High School	1,125	50	43
Lewis Co. High School	555	30	31	Wooddale High School	1,298	60	54
Lincoln Co. High School	1,525	70	63	Total	72,380	2,380	2,000



Post-High School Intentions



- Of the 3,006 students completing the survey, 74.8 percent reported that they planned to attend a college or university in the fall of 2002.
- 10.6 percent planned to pursue postsecondary education through technical, business, or vocational schools.
- 81.1 percent report that they plan to enroll as full-time students
- Differences between demographic groups
 - Race Gender
 - Income ACT Score

Factors Impacting the College Choice Decision



- The college offers the kind of program that I need
- Cost that I could afford
- Had a superior program in my intended major
- Ease in obtaining financial aid/loans
- Academic reputation of the college
- I have a scholarship to go there
- Information received from school made good impression
- The social life is attractive
- Knew more about it than other schools
- Graduates gain admission to the top graduate schools
- Part-time employment opportunities available at this college
- Located near my home
- Plan to live and work in the same state after college
- It was easy to get admitted

Variations by Race



- Both demographic groups placed emphasis on a common set of factors such as the availability of affordable, high-quality and relevant programs of study.
- Both Caucasian and African-American students report financial aid availability among their top considerations in the determination of their decision to pursue post-secondary education.
- However, African-American students placed a greater emphasis on cost concerns, financial aid, and scholarships.



Degree Aspirations



What is the highest academic degree that you hope to obtain?							
	<i>Valid Percent</i>						
	Total	Minority	White	Income less than \$30,000	Income \$30,000 and above	ACT less than 27	ACT 27 and above
	2914	656	2231	721	1761	2171	373
High School	5.4	9.3	4.1	8.6	3.9	4.2	3.2
Voc. Certificate	8.8	11.0	8.0	13.9	6.8	6.8	2.9
Associate	10.4	13.1	9.6	14.4	8.7	10.1	3.2
Bachelor	29.5	22.7	31.8	31.6	28.9	33.2	20.4
Master	46.0	43.9	46.5	31.5	51.7	45.7	70.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

- 75 percent of respondents plan to obtain a bachelors degree or higher.
- Minority students are more likely to terminate their educational experience at the high school level and are 11.7 percent less likely to pursue a degree beyond the associate level.
- Only 63 percent of low income students reported that they planned to pursue a bachelors degree or higher.

In-state v. Out-of-state



- Of those students that had selected a college, almost 84 percent reported that they planned to pursue their degree at a public college or university in Tennessee.
- “Best and brightest” students and the “brain drain” in Tennessee.
- A significant proportion of those students with high ACT and GPAs reported that they planned to pursue their educational opportunities at an out-of-state institution. Of those going out of state for their education, 23.1 percent reported an ACT score of 27 and above as opposed to 12.3 percent of those attending in-state, public institutions.



A Focus on High Achieving Students



ACT of 27 & Above - Out of State	Mean
The college offers the kind of program that I need	1.423
Academic reputation of the college	1.669
Had a superior program in my intended major	1.750
I have a scholarship to go there	1.870
Cost that I could afford	1.968
The social life is attractive	1.983
Information received from school made good impression	2.057

- Significant focus on a core group of four factors – programs relevant to their futures, academic reputation, superior programs in intended major, and availability of scholarships.
- These data support assertions of a “brain drain” and lend credence to the merit aspects of the Tennessee Education Lottery Scholarship program.



Non-Participants in Postsecondary Education



Factors Influencing Decision To Not Attend		Mean*
1	I want to work and earn some money	2.112
2	It costs too much	2.414
3	I probably could not do well in college	2.631
4	I am tired of school and want to do something else	2.667
5	Would not know what to major in	2.691
6	College is not related to my future occupation	2.777
7	No college nearby that I want to go to	2.818
8	Member of high school staff advised me against college	3.133

- Results indicate that the desire to seek employment and begin earning steady income were the most important factors with concerns for costs of college ranking a close second.
- In addition to concerns regarding the opportunity costs of college, other factors such as burnout and frustration were indicated by the respondents.



Longitudinal Comparisons of College Choice



- In 1968 the Tennessee Higher Education Facilities Commission, surveyed 9,932 Tennessee high school seniors regarding their college participation decisions.
- 66.7 percent of the respondents in the 1968 survey noted that they planned on continuing their education; 52.9 percent planned on going to college while 13.8 percent planned on going to technical, business or vocational school.
- In the 2002 survey, 85.2 percent planned on continuing their education – 74.6 percent to college and 10.6 percent to technical, business or vocational school.
- A much smaller percentage of graduating high school seniors in 2002 plan on entering the workforce out of high school than before. In 1968, 24.5 percent planned on working full time after graduation compared to only 8.8 percent in 2002.



Longitudinal Comparisons of College Choice



- The rise from 1968 to 2002 in college participation rates stems in large part from students whose father had a high school degree or less. Education, it seems, is no longer solely the domain or the goal of the offspring of educated people. Rather, it has begun to be recognized by more segments of society as a prerequisite for social mobility and economic potential.
- Financial variables including cost, employment opportunities and scholarships were markedly more critical to students in the 2002 survey than they were to students in the 1968 survey. Though it may be hard to argue that higher education costs have been substantially prohibitive in light of booming enrollments in the last 30 years, the comparison of the survey results does signal that perhaps students are required to make greater financial sacrifices today in pursuit of higher education.



Conclusions



- Consistent with the literature (Chapman 1981; Leslie & Brinkman 1987; Heller 1997), this study demonstrates that cost plays a significant role in the college choice process.
- Of the top 10 factors influencing college choice, four were related to cost. Similarly, cost and the desire to earn money were the primary reasons students chose not to attend a postsecondary institution.
- As found in Hossler, Scmitt & Vesper (1999) and Hearn (1991), academic ability was also a key indicator of college participation, as were family income and parents' education levels.
- The survey results indicate that the four most dominant factors in college choice center around a student's chosen career (college major and occupation) and cost factors.

Policy Implications



- As Tennessee transitions into the human capital economy, it is faced with a variety of unprecedented challenges. With less than 20 percent of the adult population holding a college degree, the state is limited in its ability to attract cutting edge business and industry.
- The consequences of this human capital deficiency are evident in Tennessee's poor performance on benchmark reports such as the Progressive Policy Institute's New Economy Index and the National Center for Higher Education's Measuring Up 2002.
- Unless significant and creative investments are made to increase the number of young and working adults who move into an affordable system of higher education, Tennessee and other poorly performing states will continue to lose ground in the global competition for business and industry.





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